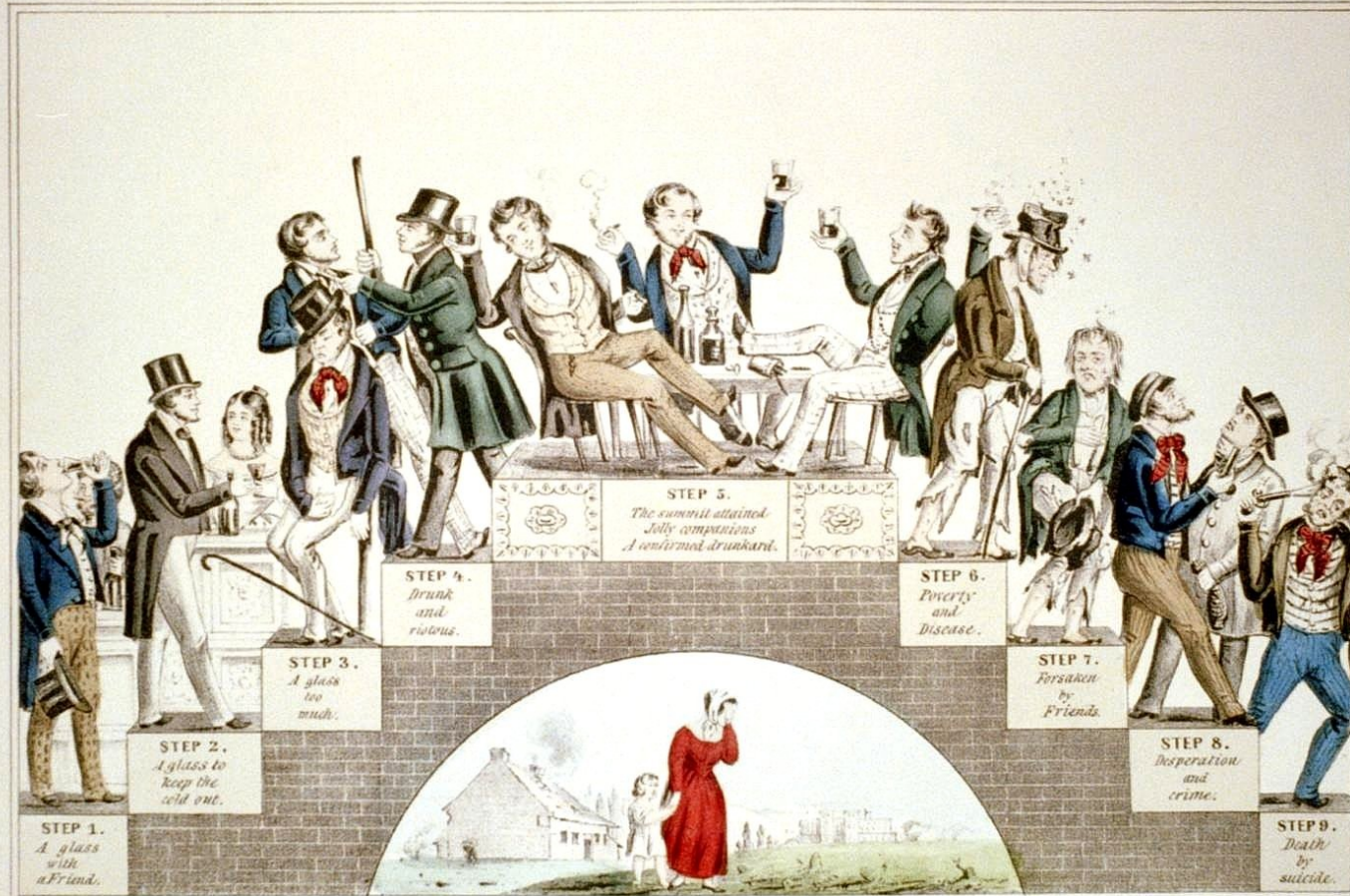


Reforming Americans I: From Mormons to Early Feminists



THE DRUNKARDS PROGRESS.

FROM THE FIRST GLASS TO THE GRAVE.

Lecture Questions

- Why did Americans become so interesting in forming and joining organizations committed to reforming America in the Antebellum Period?
- What were some important examples of reform?
- How did some women take the lessons of reform and use them to push for greater rights for women?

Reforming Americans

- Americans formed organizations to
 - Prevent the consumption of alcohol.
 - End the delivery of the mail on Sunday.
 - End Sabbath breaking (work on Sundays).
 - End the use of profanity in public.
 - Improve prison conditions.
 - Expand public education.
 - Help wage laborers and immigrants.
 - Organize cooperative religious and secular societies.
 - Abolish slavery.
 - Colonize all blacks to Africa.
 - Advocate equal rights for women.
 - Etc.

Causes of Reform

- Why had Americans suddenly become interested in forming such organizations?
 - Weak, democratic governments
 - The only way to change society was through voluntary organizations.
 - American culture encouraged civic participation.
 - The Second Great Awakening
 - The Market and Industrial Revolutions

Causes of Reform

- Why had Americans suddenly become interested in forming such organizations?
 - Weak, democratic governments
 - The Second Great Awakening
 - A religious upheaval of the early 19th c.
 - Involved a shift in the understanding of man
 - Before: Man is an irredeemable sinner (Calvinism).
 - Now: Man can be “perfected” through Christianity and reform.
 - A greater imperative to help your fellow man.
 - The Market and Industrial Revolutions

Causes of Reform

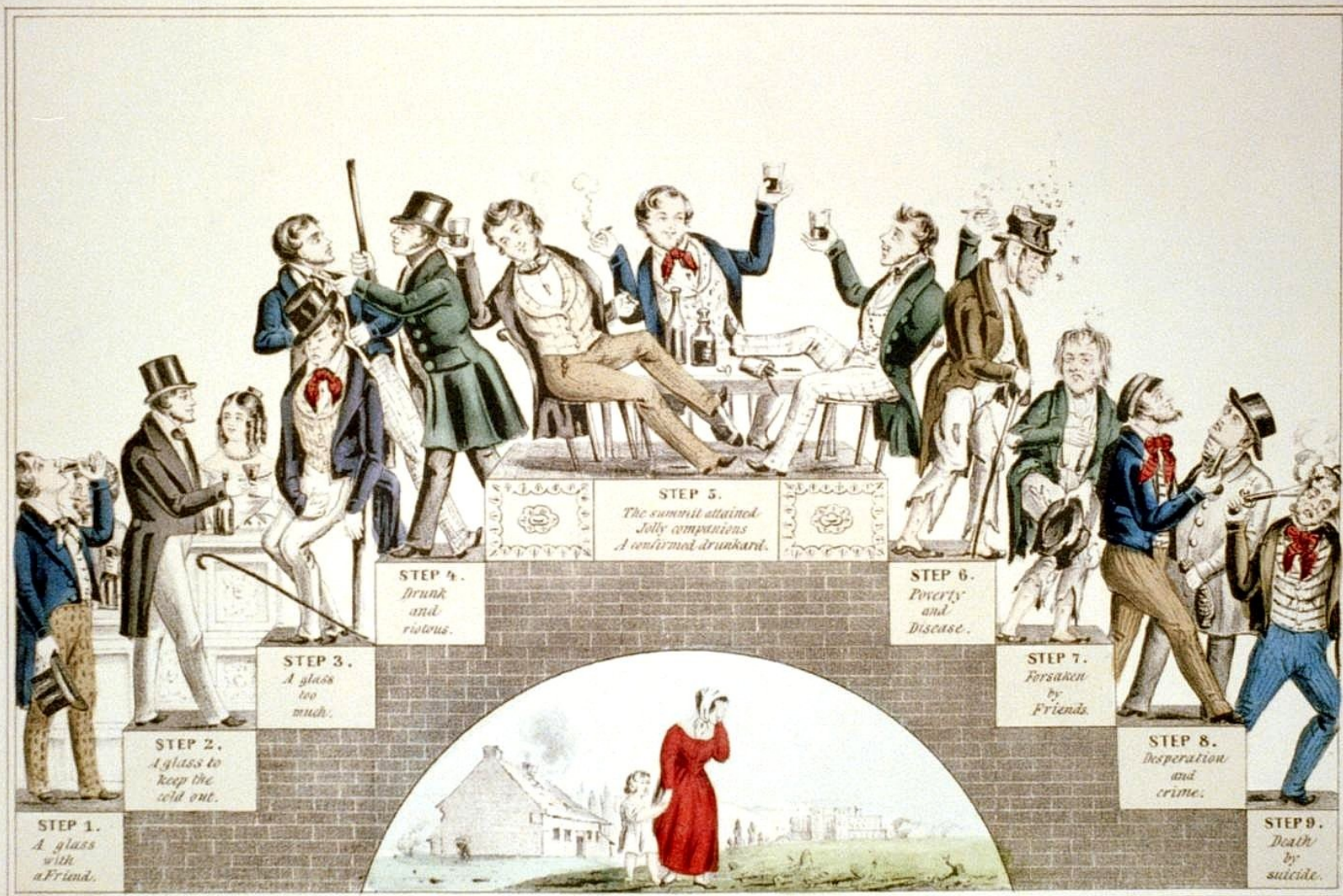
- Why had Americans suddenly become interested in forming such organizations?
 - Weak, democratic governments
 - The Second Great Awakening
 - The Market and Industrial Revolutions
 - Created a number of problems
 - Inequality
 - Individualism (i.e. selfishness)
- Reform was a way to fix these problems.
- These revolutions had also created a new middle-class with the time and money to work for reform.

Varieties of Reform

- Types of reform we will discuss
 - Temperance
 - Utopian communities
 - Feminism
 - Anti-slavery (Thursday)

Temperance

- Originally, this was the idea that people should drink less alcohol.
- By the Antebellum Period, the term had come to mean people should drink no alcohol at all.
 - Based in the belief that drinking indicated a lack of self-control and led to poverty and immorality.
 - Based on fact that people drank a lot in the early 1800s.



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American Temperance Society

- Was founded in 1826.
- Intended to end the drinking of all alcohol.
- Had immense success throughout the nation.
 - By 1830, it had 2,200 local chapters and 170,000 members.
 - By 1840, it had 8,000 local chapters and 1.5 million members.
 - By 1840, the average consumption of alcohol by Americans had fallen in half from that in 1830.
- Was willing to turn to government to further its goals.

Critics of Reform

- Many Americans opposed the Temperance Movement.
- All forms of reform elicited opposition.
 - Critics often viewed reformers as meddlers, attempting to take away their freedom.
 - They also resented their “holier-than-thou” attitude.
- The party system reflected this divide.
 - Reformers were usually Whigs.
 - Anti-reformers were usually Democrats.

Utopian Communities

- What is a “utopian community”?
 - “Utopia” comes from Thomas More’s 16th century novel *Utopia*
 - A model for a perfect society
 - Implies the model is impractical or impossible.
- Almost all utopians tried to create model communities based on cooperation.
- Not one uniform type
 - Some were religious; some were secular.
 - Some were ruled like a dictatorship; some were democratic.
 - Some practiced “free love”; some instituted polygamy; some wholly abstained from sex.



Utopian Communities of the Antebellum Period

Religious Utopias

- Most utopian communities in the 1800s were religious.
- Two examples
 - Shakers
 - Mormons

The Shakers

- Were founded in the late 1700s.
- Existed into the 1900s.
- Had around 5,000 members.
- Were founded and led by “Mother” Ann Lee, an English woman who claimed she was the female counterpart of Christ.

The Shakers

- Lived in cooperative farming communities.
 - Members withdrew from mainstream American society.
- Believed Christ has a female and male character.
- Believed in complete gender equality.
- Believed that all sex was sinful and banned members from having sexual relations.
- Got their name from dances they did in their religious services.



Shaker religious ceremony



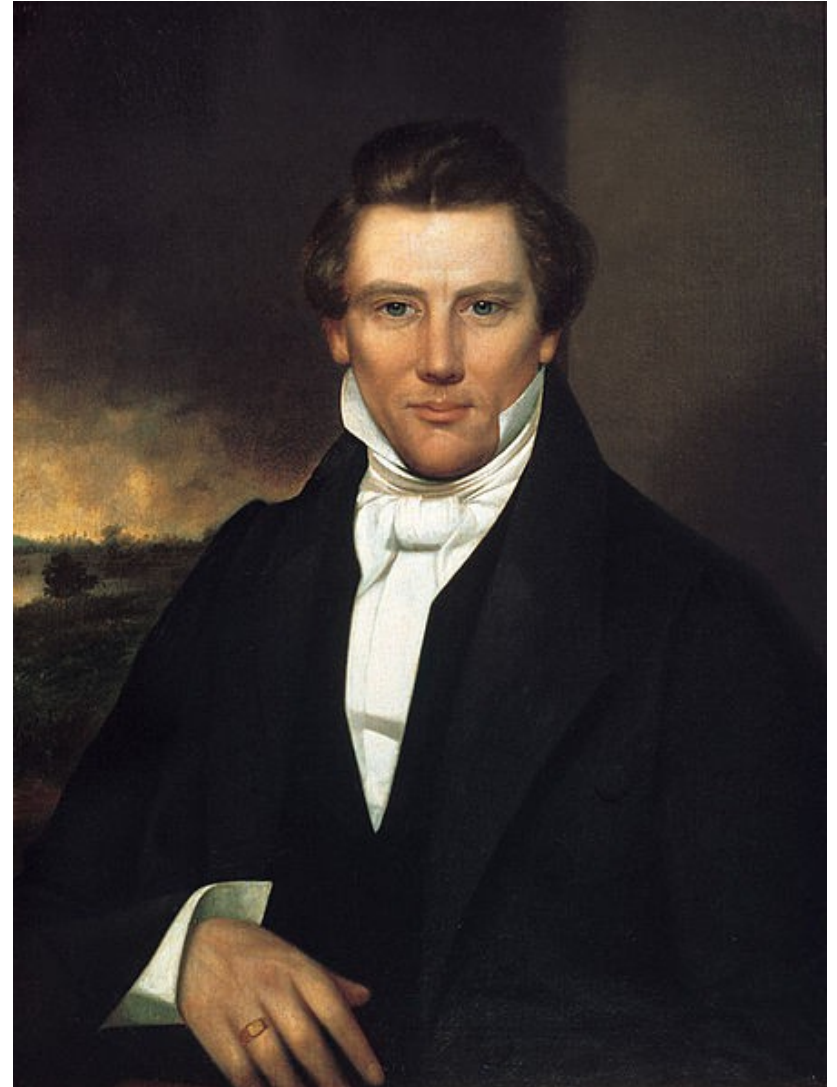
Shaker furniture

The Mormons

- Were the most long-lasting Utopian movement of the 1800s.
- Were formally known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
- Were founded in the 1820s by Joseph Smith, a farmer in upstate New York.

The Founding

- Smith claimed that he transcribed the “Book of Mormons” from a set of golden tablets.
- The Book of Mormons and Smith’s prophecies claim (among other things) that
 - Ancient Hebrews had come to North America and were the ancestors of Native Americans.
 - Jesus visited America just after his resurrection.
 - The Second Coming of Jesus would occur in Missouri.

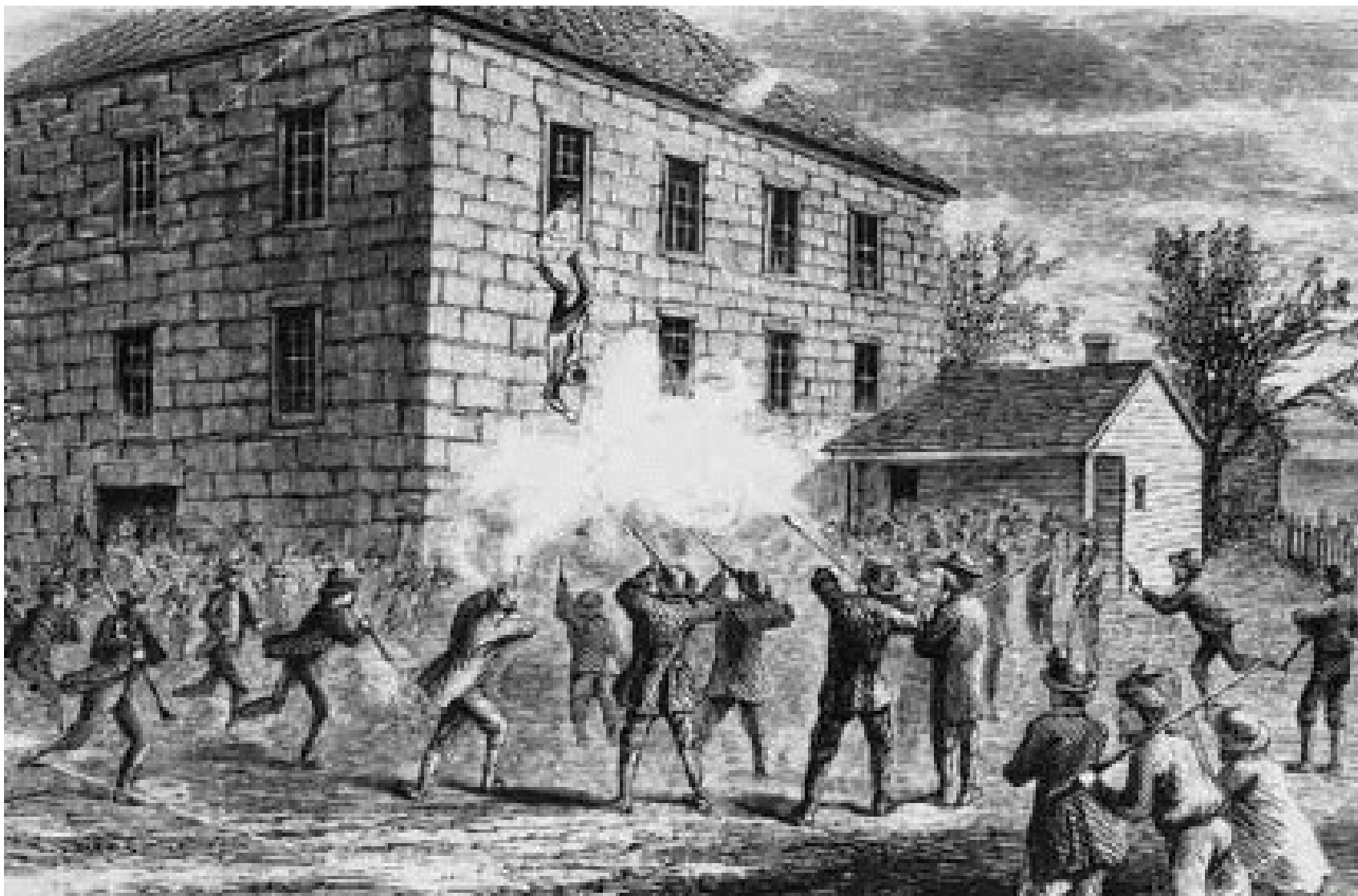


Mormonism in American Society

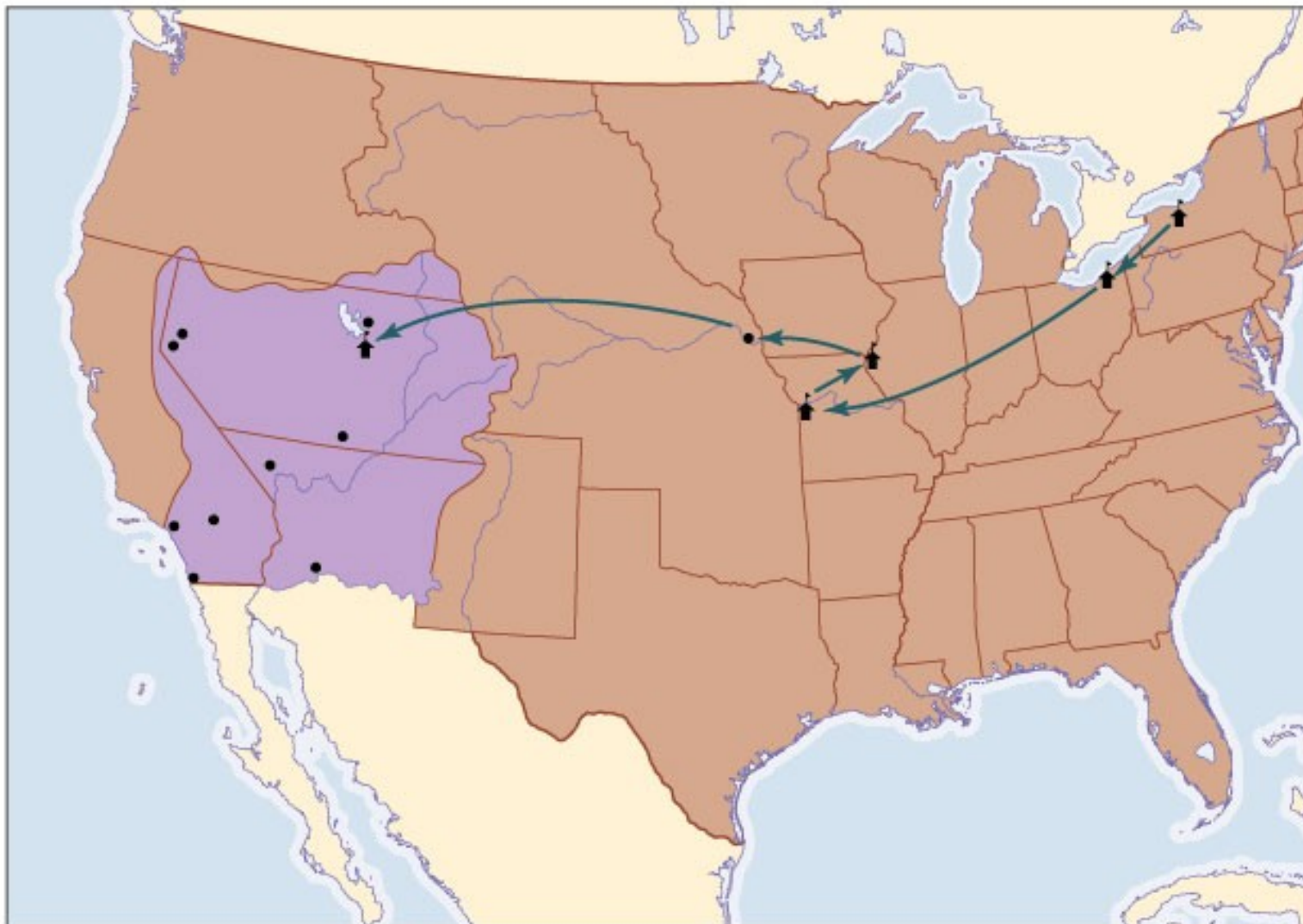
- Mormonism was surprisingly popular.
 - By 1840, it had 30,000 members.
 - By 1860, it had 80,000 members.
- Most Americans disliked them.
 - They found Smith's exercise of absolute authority and merging of church and state offensive.
 - They were offended by the practice of polygamy.

Persecution and Exodus

- Mormons faced intense persecution.
 - Mobs drove them out of New York, Ohio, and Missouri.
 - In 1839, they settled in Illinois.
 - Five years later, Smith was killed by a mob.
 - Ultimately, many Mormons trekked 1,300 miles to the deserts around the Great Salt Lake in modern Utah, the center of modern Mormonism.
 - Today, around 14 million people are Mormons.



Killing of Joseph Smith



Mormon Trek westward from 1830-1851

Secular Utopias

- Were non-religious utopias.
- Focused on new ways of social and economic organization.
 - Often organized around socialistic or communistic ideas.
- Founders hoped these new ways would be adopted by all Americans.
- These Utopias usually failed quickly.
- Examples: Owenites

Robert Owens

- Was a British factory owner.
- Theorized an ideal society in the new world of the industrial and market revolutions.
 - Communal living
 - Communal child-rearing
 - Equal rights for women
 - Equal pay for all
- Attempted to create this community in America and failed.
- Influenced the labor movement, education reformers, and the women's rights movement.





Utopian Communities of the Antebellum Period

Women in the Antebellum Period

- Legally, women had very little independence.
 - A woman was under the command of her husband.
 - He could physically “correct” her.
 - She had to be sexually available to him.
 - Married women had no property rights.
- The reality of marriages was often more complicated.

Women in the Antebellum Period

- Socially, it was believed women should
 - Stay at home to take care of their family.
 - Create a refuge for their husband from the rigors of the outside world.
- The ideal woman was beautiful, frail, dependent on men, and an object to create happiness for those men.
- Women were seen as ruled by their emotions and thus not fit for public life.

Women and Reform

- Many of the most active participants in reform were women.
 - The assumption that women were more “caring” opened reform movements to them.
 - Women made up a large proportion of the most active workers and even speakers.
 - Reform became the one area of American life where women could publically act.

Reform and Feminism

- Most women never went beyond their involvement in non-feminist reform movements.
- A few women came to believe that the place of women in society also needed reform.
 - Many early feminists came out of the antislavery movement.
 - They connected their legal condition to that of slaves.

The Seneca Falls Convention

- Was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott.
- Occurred in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York.
- Attracted around 300 people, including the famed African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments

- Was the most lasting product of the convention.
- Was modeled on the Declaration of Independence.
- Raised the issue of the right to vote.
- Raised many other issues.
 - Access to education
 - Husbands' control of property.
 - Etc.
- Was a wholesale attack on male dominated society.

The Ideals of Early Feminists

- Women should have the right to exercise and develop their talents as men did.
- Women should have the right to work if they wished.
- Women should own themselves and be free of male control.
- Women should have a say in American politics.
- At the time, these ideas were only popular amongst a very small minority of men and women.